

PLEASE TAKE ONE

Havre's Downtown Business & Railroad Historic District Walking Tour Map



In 1887, two decisions by the federal government influenced the development of northern Montana. First, Congress passed a bill that granted the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railroad a 150-foot easement through reservations and military reserves, including Ft. Assiniboine. It also gave the railroad the right to use resources for construction purposes, as well as land to build stations as long as there was not more than one for every ten miles of railroad. At the same time, the federal Northwest Commission negotiated with Native Americans a cession of nearly twenty million acres of reservation land and recognition of the railroad right-of-way. These two federal acts allowed the railroad to enter north-central Montana and opened up the lands of the northern Missouri River to white expansion.

The railroad wasted no time and construction for the Manitoba's Montana extension began in April 1887. Laying track west from Minot, North Dakota, the Manitoba reached Bull Hook Bottoms on September 6, 1887, en route to Ft. Assiniboine. Assiniboine station served as the division point between the Manitoba and the Montana Central. On November 18, 1887, the Montana extension reached Helena, completing the 643-mile distance from Minot to Helena before winter, linking the region with the national economy. In 1889, Great Northern Railway was created out of the Manitoba, forming what would be the northernmost transcontinental railroad in the United States, through the area that as a result became colloquially known as the HI-line.

The importance of Bull Hook Bottoms got a boost when the Great Northern was selecting the location for their Rocky Mountain crossing. Surveyors hoped to follow the Clark's Fork of the Columbia like the Northern Pacific, find a pass through central Montana west of Great Falls, or locate a pass west of Bull Hook Bottoms. At this time, Hill had already invested into the Great Falls Water Power and Township Company and nearby coal deposits, and Great Falls seemed poised to become Montana's main take-off point for the Pacific Extension. Surveyors searched for a Rocky Mountain route, but were unable to find a good crossing to the west of Great Falls. In December of 1889, in a blinding below zero snowstorm, Great Northern civil engineer, John Stevens, instead discovered a pass due west of Bull Hook Bottoms above the headwaters of the Marias River. Marias Pass was ideally suited to the railroad's needs as it is the lowest crossing of the Northern Rockies with a gentle slope coming from the east. Having the pass due west of Bull Hook Bottoms allowed the Great Northern to chart a direct main line from Grand Forks, North Dakota to Marias Pass that would be low grade, without curvature, and highly efficient.

Bull Hook Bottoms got a second boost when in 1890 there was a water shortage on Beaver Creek. The Great Northern needed a more reliable water source for their Pacific Extension division point and Bull Hook Bottoms' location on the Milk River fit the bill. Descelles and Pepin donated parts of their land where the tent city was located for shops and the Great Northern depot, making it an ideal location for the division point.

In 1890, the Great Northern sent several hundred workers to Bull Hook Bottoms to build a depot and several rail sidings. The depot was complete with a platform about two feet off the ground to facilitate boarding passengers and loading freight. In 1891, Bull Hook Siding was chosen as the Great Northern division point but railroad officials, especially Hill, did not think "Bull Hook Bottoms" was a dignified enough name for their new rail hub. To decide on a new name, the town held a meeting. Though that first meeting ended in a brawl, the second meeting was more successful. There, the citizenry agreed that only the original five homesteaders, Gus Descelles, Exor Pepin (nephew of Simon Pepin), Tom McDevitt, Joe Demars and Charlie Goutchie would be allowed to vote. After several suggestions, including "France" to acknowledge their common heritage, Gus Descelles then suggested Havre after his parents' hometown of Le Havre, France. "Havre", means "the haven or harbor", and won the vote.

In August of 1893, twenty-six people voted to incorporate Havre as a city on September 5 of that year. The town-site was platted south of the railroad tracks on parts of Descelles' and Simon Pepin's ranches. Like many railroad towns, Havre's streets were set in a grid formation, with the east-west orientation of the railroad serving as the northern boundary of the town paralleled to the south by Main Street, which fronted the railroad tracks, followed by First through Third Streets. The avenues ran perpendicular to the tracks with Third Avenue running south from the Great Northern depot.

In 1901, the Great Northern began a series of projects that expanded its role in Havre. That July, they started to extend their yard to over a mile long north of the machine shops on the east side of town. Later that year, new shops were constructed east of town while the old shops and the roundhouse were torn down. In December, the Great Northern opened the new freight depot and converted the old depot into a passenger station. In March 1902, they enlarged the machine shop and added an electric plant, and two years later, in 1904, constructed a new depot, still used today, trimmed with granite and landscaped with a small park. The Great Northern then converted the original depot to division offices.



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railroad tracks, followed by First through Third Streets. The avenues ran perpendicular to the tracks with Third Avenue running south from the Great Northern depot. The depot served as the gateway to the commercial district of Havre.

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While in the area be sure to see:

- Havre Beneath the Streets and the Railroad Museum
- The Buffalo Jump
- The H. Earl Clack Museum (a stop on the MT Dinosaur Trail)
- Fort Assiniboine
- Beaver Creek Park (located in the Bear Paw Mountains)

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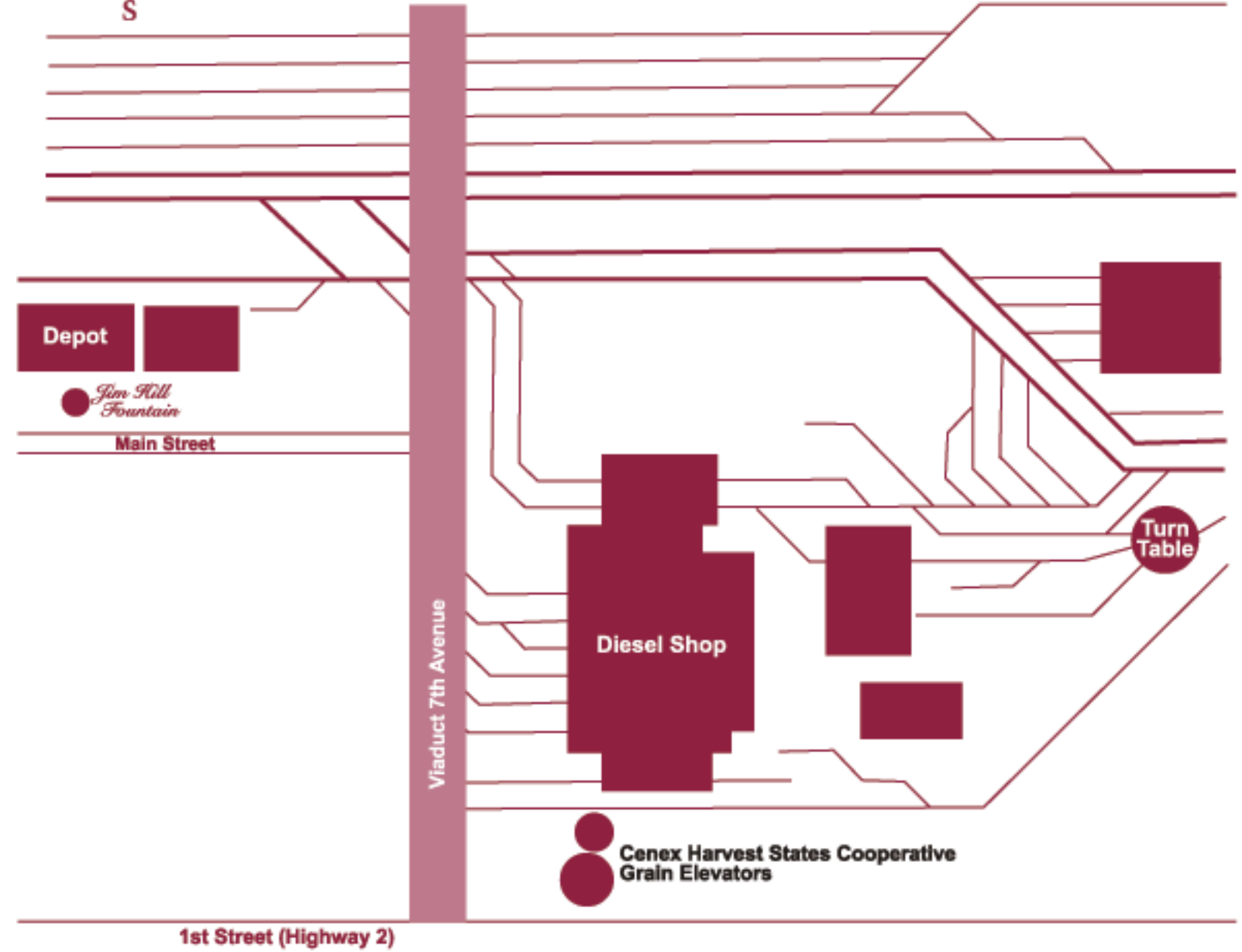
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Railroad Map *Havre, Montana*



The 1912 addition to the roundhouse shows the skylights on the top of the machine shop in the rear. The powerhouse is located on the right.



H. Earl Clack built the first grain elevator in the area, which led to a chain of five elevators that handled over 2 million bushels of grain a day.

